

# Striders of Croydon

SEPTEMBER 2017 MAGAZINE



**Our Veterans League team after the final match of the 2017 season, at Croydon Arena**

**Left to right: Alan Dolton, Robin Jamieson, Linda Daniel, Neil Riches, Steph Upton, Paul Cripps, Debra Bourne, Steve Massey, Sandra Francis, Sam O'Dongo, Peter Johnson, Joseph Ibe**

**(photo by Karim Akhtar)**

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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **2017**

Sun 24 Sep – Switchback 5 – Lloyd Park / Addington Hills (Striders organising)  
Wed 27 Sep – Club Annual General Meeting – Sandilands  
Sat 30 Sep – East Surrey League Cross-Country – Lloyd Park  
Sun 8 Oct – Croydon 10K – Lloyd Park Avenue  
Sat 14 Oct – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Wimbledon  
Sat 14 Oct – Surrey Womens Cross-Country League Division 2 - Reigate  
Sat 21 Oct – Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships – Richmond Park  
Sat 11 Nov – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Richmond Park  
Sat 11 Nov – Surrey Womens Cross-Country League Division 2 – Nonsuch Park

### **2018**

Sat 6 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – venue to be confirmed  
Sat 13 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – venue to be confirmed  
Sat 13 Jan – Surrey Womens Cross-Country League Division 2 – Richmond Park  
Sat 10 Feb – Surrey Cross-Country League Division 2 – Lloyd Park  
Sat 10 Feb – Surrey Womens Cross-Country League Division 2 – Wimbledon  
Sun 8 Apr – Croydon Half-Marathon (Striders organising)  
Sun 22 Apr – London Marathon (Striders marshalling)

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER SEPTEMBER 2017

Alan has put together your contributions for the club magazine/newsletter for the September edition and asked me to contribute my bit as Chairman's Corner. Unfortunately we chose this time to go on our annual trip to the South of France with our ageing and slightly battered caravan. However, since my first trip way back in 1966 the technology has somewhat improved and he was able to mail me a link to the draft copy. I would have used this as a prompt to get some ideas for my bit. Unfortunately the technology isn't yet good enough for me to be able to download and read the draft while sitting in the corner of a field overlooking Lake Annecy.

Instead I will have to reveal the real reason for our trip which was to research some new run routes for your marathon training runs this winter. This is in anticipation of the next development in technology which will allow us to travel to the sun in less time than it currently takes us to get to London Bridge. Dream on...

1) About 300 miles south of Calais is a convenient resting place called Lac de la Liez near the town of Langres. The route round the lake is dead flat traffic free and a good running surface and exactly 10 miles. The start/finish is at the café by the lake. I ran it last year but unfortunately part of the route was blocked by felled trees and deep mud which involved a cross between hurdling and mud bathing to negotiate. This year it is all clear and would make a perfect start to our training season if only we could get there....

2) In the south to the west of Cannes is the the Forest of Esterel. Shirley Hills on a very grand scale. Nearly all closed to traffic in the summer and a mix of Tarmac traffic free roads and off road trails. Some a bit tough but quite runnable. My regular route was about 10k, about 6k on tarmac and 4K off road, but it would be quite possible to come up with routes right up to marathon distance. Also some superb cycling on or off road with a good mountain climb. The only snag there was a forest fire in the distance one day. We watched the smoke rising and the planes coming into bomb it with water. Fortunately they succeeded. The following morning I set off for my usual run only to discover after 4K there was a gate and tape across the road and a sign saying No entry, for your own safety. Apparently there had been some more small fires. So we headed for Lake Annecy.

3) A couple of superb cycle routes here mostly on cycle paths on about 20 miles round the lake but also quite a few runners to be seen. Alternatively the Col de la Forclas hill climb. A 7k climb from the lake side at about 1500 feet to the col at 3800 feet. Mainly for cyclists but we did pass a couple of runners. Two years ago I managed both on my bike though chickened out of running any of it. This year I still have two days to rise to the challenge....

And so back to the real world.

Don't forget it's the Switchback on Sunday 24th. Your club needs you to help make it a great success so don't forget. Either run it or offer to help.

And don't forget it's the club AGM on Wednesday 27th. An opportunity to celebrate the club and your individual successes. So come along. There will be a shorter run than usual, food before the meeting and the usual prize giving.

Personally I am happy to continue as your chairman for one more year if you still want me but I will have to step down next year. Both for personal reasons and because I think it's about time someone a bit younger and more competitive took up the reins.

May all your runs be through sunlit forests. (Mine have been recently)

*Robin Jamieson*



## WILL YOU BE DOING XC THIS SEASON? (by Krzysztof Klidzia)



19/2/2015 **Phoebe Law** (1134) **Grace Baker** (1002) **Rebecca Murray** (1020) **Amy Griffiths** (1007) Junior Womens race. Saucony English National Cross Country Championships. photo by Gary Mitchell

### WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

With a new Cross-Country season, just around the corner it is high time to give you a little spice and advice on just what it's all about. There have been some great running performances during the spring/summer from marathons to track events with many PBs. Now as the XC season gets under way it is a great opportunity to take those runs and build on them. Forget the PBs; this is all about strength, vitality and stamina through those dark months of winter, which will bring you out next spring better prepared, mentally tough and with a spring (excuse the pun) in your step as you find those road and track races all that much easier.

For the uninitiated amongst you, each county has its own cross-country leagues, which are split into divisions, normally up to four. Similar to football, the higher (lower number) the division the better it is. We race to score points for our club, with the finish position of the top runners being added together for an overall club score and rank within the division. At the end of the season, the runners from all divisions can battle it out at county, regional, national, and, if selected, Surrey Counties, European and World Cross Country Championships (Peter Mills/James Bennett get a move on and represent us at the Worlds!)

### THE HISTORY

#### Striders Men

Striders entered the Men's Surrey League XC in 1986. We won Division 3 in 2002, and placed third in Division 2 in both 2003 and 2010. Peter Mills has been our only male Strider

representative in the Inter Counties XC Championships in 2016. Striders men have usually run in Division 2 of the Surrey League, but weakened teams in the first two races saw us demoted to Division 3 two years ago. Now we are back and getting as many runners out as we can with a current strong crop could even get us promoted to Division 1.

Recent highs:

- Peter Mills winning the Pirie 10-mile local XC race organised by SLH, December 2016.
- Peter Mills qualifying and representing Surrey in the County Championships
- The Men's team winning promotion to Division 2 in the 2016/17 season
- James Bennett and Peter Mills claiming first and seconds in many of the XC races
- Great Britain European Masters representative Simon Pannell

### **A few reflections from Alan Dolton and Chris Morton on Striders Men XC races:**

1) In 2003, the final Surrey League Division 2 match was not held until 15 March, at Richmond Park, because the October match had been controversially postponed at the request of British Airways. We went into the match in 2nd place, behind Box Hill but some way ahead of 3rd-placed Stragglers. We had an impressive turnout of 29 runners, hoping to celebrate promotion to Division One for the first time in our history. Unfortunately, Stragglers had other ideas and produced their strongest team of the season to snatch the second promotion spot. We had five runners in the first 30, but our other five scorers finished a bit too far down the field.

2) Having been relegated from Division 2 to Division 3 in 2004, we went into the final Division 3 match of the 2004/05 season (at Wimbledon on 12 Feb 2005) in 4th place, well behind Epsom and Woking and just behind Dorking. Woking fielded an unexpectedly weak team: we fielded a strong team, won the match and climbed to 2nd in the final Division 3 table to gain an unexpected promotion back to Division 2. Justin Macenhill placed 10th, covering the 5-mile course in 30 minutes 29 seconds. Scott Antony, in only his second race for the club, produced an excellent run to place 13th in 31 minutes 03, while Iain Harrison placed 15th (31.40). Our team packed very well with the next six scorers finishing within less than 30 seconds: Damian Macenhill in 25th (33.03), closely followed by John Foster (26th in 33.13) and Andy Allison (27th in 33.14); Nigel Davidson was 31st (33.25) while Toby Watson made an excellent debut to finish 33rd (33.29), just one place and one second ahead of Chris Morton, and Paul Finch completed the scoring team in 44th place (34.23).

3) In 2009/10 our men's team won the first two Surrey League Division 2 matches and were 3rd in the third match, leaving us on top of the table heading into the final match at Richmond Park on 6 Feb. However, we were without a couple of our leading runners and had to settle for 3rd place out of the nine competing clubs. In the final table Dorking won the Division Two championship with 1358 points, while Stragglers took 2nd with 1371 and Striders slipped to 3rd with 1392, just missing out on promotion after having led the division for three-quarters of the season. Unlike 2003, when there was some controversy about the final match taking place unusually late, we had nobody to blame for this but ourselves.

4) In 2011/12 our men finished last in the first Surrey League Division 2 match and we were still in the relegation zone with two matches remaining. However, we saved ourselves from relegation with a good second half of the season, finishing 4th in the penultimate match at Reigate and 6th in the final match on 11 February (a very cold day) at Esher. We finished 6th in the final table. (Dulwich, who had been 5th going into the final match and had looked to be safe, fielded an unexpectedly weak team, finished the season in 8th place, and were relegated.)

### **A few quotes from the Striders Men's XC members on 'Why I love XC':**

"Cross country is a team sport. It's a tactical race of getting as many points as you can for your team. It's a chance for the gritty cross-country runners to get one over on the fair-weather road runners. The league system and the 10-to-score points system encourages all



the teams to turn out as many runners as they can, of all abilities; this generates much more team spirit and club morale compared with the road season. Beers afterwards always hit the spot and the steamy team bath is enjoyed by all.” (Peter Mills)

“You can leave your watch at home and just run/race as you feel. The cross-country season also gives me a focus each year to get training. Running with team mates gives an extra buzz too... and there's often a post-race beer involved.” (Mick Turner)

“I love the team camaraderie, the fantastic scenery, time flashing by, with the intense focus on the terrain and fellow runners, plus the benefits it gives to my overall running. There is also the added benefit that if a rival runner is causing you grief, XC enables you to gently elbow them into the mud without feeling guilty about injuring them as you would do in a road race.” (Anon)

I love cross country because it gives me the opportunity to really push myself in a supportive team environment. Plus, who can resist splashing about in the mud on a Saturday afternoon? (Simon Pannell)

### **Striders Women**

Striders women have been competing in the Women's Surrey League since 1988 and have won promotion to Division 1 four times, but were relegated after only one season each time. Jane Lansdown has been the only women Strider representative in the Inter Counties XC Championships in 2000.

Here are a couple of pictures of earlier incarnations of the Women's team:



**The 2002 team – six senior women, plus two Under-15 girls**





**The 2008 team celebrating promotion to Division One**



**A recent Team: London XC Championships 2016 Parliament Hills**



## A few words from Steph Upton and fellow Striders Women XC Runners



**Please join the *triders* women's xcountry team**

We desperately need some more runners for the women's XC. It doesn't matter if you are fast or slow, we want as many women to compete as possible.

The first 5 scorers will be team A, then the next 5 scorers we will have team B, C etc...

Here are some quotes from other members:-

"The weather is cold, the hills are tough and the mud can be foul (or sticky, gloopy & claggy) – you'll quickly become an expert in mud analysis. I do XC because I love the team spirit! I always feel a great sense of pride for our ladies who have given up their Saturday afternoon to represent the Striders." (Becky)

"Hates: mud, hills, running; bad weather! Likes: having numerous people cheer you on and up the hills, and Steph's cakes afterwards. :-) I do actually love running in the mud; I enjoy the extra challenge it brings and experiencing all the different cross-country courses. When the sun is out, which it has been on occasion, it's great. I also particularly enjoy the team aspect of cross country. Running isn't generally a team sport but it feels good when you're all in it together! Experiences I recall: Parliament Hills and Denbies in the horrific pouring rain (feeling like my shoes were being sucked off my feet) and Wimbledon in beautiful sunshine!" (Zoe)

"I've enjoyed most of the cross-country races that I've done. I like the fact that they are not too long in distance and therefore don't require any additional training, the routes are varied, interesting and often scenic. Most of my enjoyment is being part of a team and travelling together, getting to know your team mates better, as well as meeting runners from other clubs. Although it is by nature a competitive event, I generally find that many runners do it for fun and don't take it too seriously. The downsides? Mud under your toenails isn't pleasant. But with the right shoes, a warm change of clothes, a welcome hot cup of tea and a piece of cake afterwards, it is quite a satisfying thing to do to liven up your weekend. Running for the Striders XC team is very inclusive, for all abilities, and our fantastic team manager makes sure we all know where we are going and what we're doing; it's great having such support." (Selena)

"I have been taking part in the Surrey league cross countries over a number of years, mainly because I like to support the league and particularly the Striders team. I enjoy the shared experiences, the support and camaraderie of fellow colleagues. I remember running in the snow at Happy Valley in Coulsdon and seeing how picturesque the Valley looked, feeling 'rained upon and windswept' after a race at the Denbies Wine Estate in Dorking, and at a fixture in Richmond Park admiring the beautiful deer whilst acquiring a suntan in unseasonably hot conditions in February! All standards are welcome, from the super-fast to the not so fast. It's the taking part and counting towards the club points that matters and the icing on the cake, literally, is whenever you finish a Surrey league xc you can guarantee a well-deserved homemade slice(s) of cake/brownies: the perfect ingredients to come back for more." (Linda)

"Cross country: a love-hate relationship. As the XC season draws near again, I start to get excited about some more exciting and interesting runs than just running on roads. I've done XC for three seasons now and thoroughly enjoyed each one, despite the mud. The team is like a massive sisterhood. It's nice to run with just women, travelling together to the races



and getting to know each other. At the start, standing there in the mud, cold and often wind, you begin to wonder why you're there. Throughout the run I constantly think "just over a parkrun" to complete. The runs can be difficult but they're fun at the same time and we're always rewarded with cake, tea and get to hear about each other's experiences afterwards. Don't let the mud or worries about your fitness levels put you off... the teams are very mixed and you'll always find a nemesis to chase each race! See you in the mud :)" (Adele)

"Short courses normally 2 laps one short and one large lap. Very pretty courses and unusual ones: Mitcham Common was one – who would believe we ran on a rubbish dump? I have also done Parliament Hills a couple of times – very nice, but also muddy, in fact I keep getting stuck in the mud and managing to fall over while I try to retrieve my shoe. The men had to go around me, but I managed to finish. I was asked whether I had overtaken anyone. Answer: "no, as I was too busy trying to stay upright." Why do I keep coming back? Great fun, good comradeship between the ladies in all the clubs. Even the slower runners like me get competitive." (Victoria)

Here are some other running quotes that capture the excitement and spirit of cross country running:

- **"The start of a World Cross Country event is like riding a horse in the middle of a buffalo stampede. It's a thrill if you keep up, but one slip and you're nothing but hoof prints." (Ed Eyestone, two-time Olympic marathoner and long distance runner).**
- **"The freedom of Cross Country is so primitive. It's woman vs. nature." (Lynn Jennings, Three-time World Cross Country Champ).**
- **"For something to hurt that bad, and feel so good, it's just inexplicable." (Adam Goucher, NCAA Cross Country Division 1 Individual Champ – 1998)**
- **"Embrace the mud. The dirt. The grit." (Nike)**
- **"If cross country was easy, it would be called track." (seen on a cross country runner's T-shirt)**
- **"I love controlling a race, chewing up an opponent. Let's get down and dirty. Let's fight it out. It's raw, animalistic, with no one to rely on but yourself. There's no better feeling than that." (Adam Goucher)**
- **"We told our guys to hold on for 30 minutes of agony for 12 months of glory." (John McDonnell, Arkansas cross country coach)**
- **"There is no time to think about how much I hurt; there is only time to run." (Ben Logsdon)**

"Well, if this has got you excited and ready to join the women's x-country team then all you need are good shoes, your Striders' top and maybe some gloves...! We have a fantastic team manager in Andy Elliott, so next time the email comes around asking if you are running, give it a go, I'm sure you will enjoy it! We look forward to welcoming you to the women's x-country team for the 2017–18 season." (Steph)



**Parliament Hills – November 2016 (left); Farthing Downs – February 2017 (right)**

## **WHY IS XC GOOD FOR YOU?**

Cross country, or off-road racing in general, is all about strength. Even if it's just 5k, the nature of the race with its surface, its hills and its turns make strength a much bigger asset than speed. So, a good rule of thumb is to try and be prepared for the race.

The undulating terrain and hills means you are using more muscles than in any other type of running, in turn strengthening the legs. The uneven ground stabilises lower leg muscles and develops them into great 'absorbers', whilst the changes of pace help improve the cardiovascular capacity of runners. Furthermore, contrary to some suggestions which state cross-country running increases the chance of injury, if done properly it's arguably less stressful on the leg joints as the impact from the earth tends to be much less than on other surfaces. Clearly, then, the payoff of running cross country in the winter is considerable physical benefits, which will ultimately make you stronger and faster for the road and track come the spring and summer.

However, the benefits are not just physical. Cross country is also a great way to escape the hustle and bustle of modern life and people often get a sense of exhilaration and freedom from racing through the countryside. Training or racing over the trails and fields of Britain's numerous areas of outstanding natural beauty also enables runners to experience nature and break from the monotony of pounding pavement or circling the track. What's more, the focus is often on the simple act of running, as imprecise distances and changeable terrain mean times are less pertinent compared to track running. This means runners commonly improve the important skill of pace judgement, as well as experience the liberation of not having their runs dictated by their watch. The aim in each race is the competition against other runners, which hones competitive instincts – transferable to all other running environments. Being able to race across uneven terrain whilst being numbed by the wind, rain and occasional snow, will almost certainly toughen up the mental aptitude of athletes, something which is also very much key for successful road and track seasons.

On top of this, cross country offers camaraderie in that the emphasis can often be on conquering the course as much as beating other runners, and this helps to engender a real sense of community – also apparent in the team spirit encouraged by cross country.

## **WHERE DO WE RUN?**

We run in fantastic locations, the most famous being Parliament Hills at Hampstead Heath where the London Championships are held and every few years the Nationals. The local



Surrey League or East Surrey League races take place in local areas such as Wimbledon Common, Farthing Downs, Epsom Downs and our very own Lloyd Park. Sometimes we run at National Heritage grounds such as Polesden Lacey in the South of Thames races or further afield for the Nationals in Leicester or Nottingham. There is a great variety, each with unique features: some hilly, some flat, some with woodland, some with all those intertwined.

For the Veterans' races you can even take yourself off to other countries, as Simon Pannell did this very year to take part in the Great Britain team for the European Masters XC in Aarhus, Denmark.

## WHAT TO WEAR

You can wear flat running shoes if you want, but then the slightest bit of mud and rain will double your energy output and even send you tumbling! A good pair of XC spikes or trail shoes are the best and ideally it is best to have both options, choosing which to wear on the day depending on just how the ground conditions are. Some of us (me) much prefer trail shoes others (Peter Mills) prefer spikes.

### Trail shoes



These are more suited for longer XC races where comfort over a longer distance is important. They are also useful for races where the conditions are firmer and less muddy. There are plenty on the market, I like these which have a snug fit and are quite light. It depends on your type of foot and what feels comfortable. With twisting and turning and wet and mud it is even more important in XC than road running to have a shoe you can feel comfortable in. Ask around other runners to see what they wear.

### XC Spikes



When the mud and rain bring wet slippery conditions, XC spikes are of a real benefit as they dig into the ground and keep you upright as you push up or down hills and tight bends. The Saucony Kilkeny shown above is a popular mid-range XC spike shoe which has good comfort and seems quite durable. The length of spikes depends very much on how muddy or frozen it might be. If very muddy a long spike of say 12–15 mm would allow you to dig deep into the soil. On the other hand, to penetrate the ice a shorter spike of say 6–9 mm would be sufficient. Usually spikes come in 6 mm, 9 mm, 12 mm and 15 mm but they can go longer than this.



**Clothing:** a club vest, long sleeve vest is a must, you can always wear another layer underneath. Gloves should never be far away; white socks will become brown socks. and shorts-long tracksters.

It is well worth bringing some warmer clothes to wrap up before and especially after with a rain/wind proof jacket. Bring at least 4 safety pins to attach your number which will be given out on the day.

**Club Tent/Flag:** we always carry and share the load of carrying the club flag and tent. The tent for storing bags on site especially in case it rains (not for sleeping unless you are Lee Flanagan!)

Sometimes or all the time for the women's xc there are cakes at the end or chocolates biscuits, but it is always worth bringing your own small supply for sustenance after the race. (I remember Chris Morton bringing some strange looking food that could have been a performance enhancer for running!)

## HOW THE SCORING WORKS

**Men:** The main league for us is the Surrey League, which meets four times per season. The first 10 score, going from lowest to highest. These scores are added up. The team with the lowest score on the day comes out top.

*Example:* Striders 1, 3, 8, 10, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24 = 129

Sinners 2, 4, 6, 9, 14, 20, 23, 26, 28, 30 = 162

Lowest score is Striders so we win!

Other events vary from first 3–6 runners home, but usually following the same criteria, while relays are based on the fastest cumulative time.

**Women:** Women's Surrey League. As mentioned by Steph, the first 5 score in each of an A and B team, plus a C team, etc. if there are enough runners....



## WHEN DO THEY TAKE PLACE?

Traditionally on a Saturday afternoon 2–3pm (women's races start slightly earlier, with the Surrey League races held at 12 noon) but there are exceptions, either in the morning or on a Sunday.

## WHAT TO EAT BEFORE A RACE

Porridge brings a warmth and lightness to the stomach  
Toast can be to others' taste but can be a little heavier to digest  
Some eat a sandwich or cereal bar nearer the time  
But bear in mind it can bring a stitch  
Making you curse like a witch!  
Eating 3 hours before is a usual adjust  
Eat just before at your peril if you must!

## POST-RACE

Especially after the Surrey League races we tend to go for drinks after the race and there is no doubt you deserve it! We also do so at other races if location allows. Results for the Surrey League are well organised and come in quite quickly, but for some of the other races there may be a few days' delay before results are available.

## TRANSPORT

We usually meet at East Croydon and head onwards from there but now we have both James Burree and Adele Boesinger who are Midas certified to drive a minibus from Croydon Accessible Transport Services, so some 15 passengers can travel this way if a venue is difficult to get to; otherwise we share cars (the women often do this).

## FINALLY.....

Please do come along and give it a try; XC is a fantastic event and with such a rich vein of running at all levels in the club, XC running will enrich your running and benefit your training making you a stronger runner. I leave you with Sir Mo Farah's words (soon to be a Marathon world beater!) Sir Mo Farah cites cross country as an important part of his success: "I usually take part in cross-country races during the winter to help my preparations for the major championships... it makes you strong and it's a great way to progress your training."

## RACE CALENDAR 2017/18

### **The Crucial Ones!**

**Surrey League Men:** (Contact Krzysztof)

Competitive, but absolutely open to all, the first 10 score but it is great to have strength in numbers, everyone is welcome.

14/10/17 Wimbledon Common 5M

11/11/17 Richmond Park 5M

13/01/18 Venue TBC 5M

10/02/18 Lloyd Park 5M

**Surrey League Women:** (Contact Andy Elliott Women's XC Manager)

Competitive, but as above everyone is welcome.

14/10/17 Reigate Priory Park Distance TBC

11/11/17 Nonsuch Park, Sutton Distance TBC

13/01/18 Richmond Park Distance TBC

10/2/18 Wimbledon Common Distance TBC

### **The other main races in the season: (Contact Krzysztof)**

#### **Ours!**

- The Switchback 5, 24 September 2017, Lloyd Park and Addington Hills; 5 miles. Run or volunteer at this if you possibly can. Worth it just for the cake!

#### **The relay xc races**

- Sparrow's Den Relays in Bromley, 10th September 2017. Teams of 4 men and teams of 4 women, each person running 4k. Fantastic team and family event with a low-key feel.
- Reigate Relays, Priory Park, 4th November 2017. Men 4 legs x 2.5 miles; women 3 legs x 2.5 miles. In a lovely setting, a short, fast team event.

#### **The local league**

- East Surrey League, Lloyd Park, 30th September 2017 5 miles. Low-key race, a good introduction to XC running right on your own doorstep!
- East Surrey League Wimbledon Common in December 2017 Date TBC 5 miles

#### **The multi club gatherings**

Who needs a Tough Mudder when you get one of these? Set in lovely locations, expect mud, woodland, colourful club flags, a vibrant atmosphere and lots of team tents!

- Surrey Masters XC Championships 21 October 2017; Richmond Park (10k for men 35–59; 6k for men 60+ and women 35+)
- London XC Championships 18 November 2017; Parliament Hills (10k Men 6k Women)
- Surrey XC Championships January 2018; Venue TBC (7.5 miles Men, 5 miles Women)
- Southern XC Championships 27 January 2018; Venue TBC (15k Men 8k Women)
- National XC Championships 26 February 2018; Nottingham (12k Men 8k Women)
- South of Thames inter-club race 26 November 2017; Beckenham Place (Venue Provisional) 5M
- South of Thames XC Championships 16 December 2017 Aldershot near Wellington Monument (Venue Provisional) 7.5 miles
- Croydon Harriers Invitational XC Lloyd Park 6M Usually first week in March 2018; date TBC Low-key relaxed event; men and women run together.

Thanks to Alan, Steph and all those who added some contributions.



## **THE COMRADES MARATHON (by Debra Bourne)**

It's five am, it's dark and I'm standing on a road in central Durban surrounded by more than 17,000 other runners, listening to the Chariots of Fire theme music blaring out from loudspeakers. It can only be Comrades.

Comrades is an iconic race, the oldest ultramarathon in the world – it's been running since 1921, every year except for 1940–1944 – and the largest, with entries capped at 20,000. It was started by Vic Clapham, to commemorate the South African soldiers who fell in the Great War. Due to his memory of the long marches during that war, he wanted to use a feat of endurance for this remembrance. The Comrades Marathon route winds on roads, originally dirt but now all tarmacked, between the town of Pietermaritzburg and the city of Durban. The 'down' run, approximately 89 km (56 miles) starts outside the Town Hall in Pietermaritzburg and finishes in Durban. On the alternate years the 'up' run starts outside the Town Hall in Durban and finishes some 87 km (54 miles) later in Pietermaritzburg. The difference in distance is dictated by the need for wide streets on which to start and a suitable venue such as a stadium (or sometimes racecourse, in Pietermaritzburg) in which to finish. Whichever direction you run it, there are plenty of hills: the first half of the 'down' run is a rather hilly marathon.

Last year, having come out to South Africa but, due to injury, not been able to run Comrades, I stood in the start pen in Pietermaritzburg in sandals and ordinary day clothes, and listened to the South African national anthem, then the 'second anthem', Shosholoza, then Chariots of Fire, with my heart speeding up despite my knowing that I was not going to cross the start line. Last year, after the gun fired, I stood off to the side and watched the runners go past, then wiped my eyes and drove Terry's hire car back to Durban. This year I'm dressed in my running gear, the Champion Chip that will confirm my run is threaded through the laces on my right running shoe, and I'm going to run: 87 km (54 miles) of hilly road stretch ahead of me.



**In the "D" start pen in Durban with thousands of other runners**

Having been driven along the route two days earlier by Mike – or Mac3 as I know him on the Runner's World forum – I have been reminded of just how much of the route is hilly: almost all of it. With 6,030 ft (1,938 m) of ascent and 3,992 ft (1,217m) of descent on the 'Up' run, there is very little of the route that could be considered flat or even flattish. I remind myself that I have previously run several 50-mile races, including the North Downs Way 50 (5,600 ft of ascent), the South Downs Way 50 (5,700 ft of ascent) and the Lakeland 50 (3,100 m, i.e. over 10,000 ft of ascent). But those were four years ago and before a torn posterior tibial tendon, fractured fibula and stress-fractured pelvis. And they were on trail. This will be further than I have ever run before, and by far the furthest I've run on road. And it will most definitely test whether those injuries are truly healed.

The music fades. The famous recorded cockerel crow, originally voiced by Max Trimbourn, sounds out. A moment's pause, then the gun goes off and I jump and a cloud of birds explodes from the nearby trees (I feel bad about that and hope they all alight again safely).

And we're off. Or at least the front runners are. It's three minutes before I and my fellows in D-pen cross the start line. Spectators line the roads, shouting encouragement as we set off on the long miles to Pietermaritzburg. A couple of turns, right and left, then we're heading up an incline and out of the city onto the main highway for a short while. Here there are fewer spectators – but still some hardy souls. We trot on steadily. Having felt quite cool as we left the hotel, after only a few minutes of running I'm already well warmed up and wondering what it's going to be like when the heat hits. I remember the advice to avoid the cat's eyes and I refuse to give in to the temptation to follow the white lines on the road. Over to my left I see someone trip and fall, possibly a victim of those hazardous cat's eyes, but other runners quickly grab them and set them back on their feet.

Veering off the modern highway we join the scenic route, the R103 that we will basically follow for the rest of the race. Even in these sections we have supporters who have set up by the side of the road with their chairs and picnic tables.

Generally preferring trail races and events with smaller fields, the sheer number of other runners feels strange to me. I wonder who else is out here who I know. Simply walking to the start I had bumped into a couple of the other Brits that I knew, then spotted two more standing not far from me in D-pen. Now, out of nowhere a voice cries: "Debra! What are the odds?" and Mark, a member of the 100-Marathon Club who occasionally runs at Lloyd parkrun, waves at me as he passes.

We keep running. The road climbs, then falls, then climbs again. Every couple of kilometres we reach an aid station offering pouches of water and Energaid, as well as cups of Coke and cream soda. I generally snag two of the water pouches, one to pour over me and one to mostly drink before squeezing the rest out on my head. I reach into my waist pouch for my energy balls and pieces of Kendal Mint Cake, and occasionally squirt some neat Elete electrolyte solution straight into my mouth from the 25ml bottle (tastes foul taken concentrated like that, but never mind). After a while I start spotting the salted potatoes, quarter oranges and half-bananas being offered and from then on take one or more of those at each aid station.

As the sun rises higher I pull out my tube of sunscreen and spread it over myself, while running, particularly making sure I've covered my shoulders and the back of my neck: sunburn would not be a good addition to the experience. The sections where the road is tree-lined and shaded are much appreciated, but more of the route is open. I pull out my sunglasses and stick those on.

There are sections where the views are truly wonderful, if you just take a moment to look around, rather than concentrating on the road in front of you.

A group of runners is captured from behind as they jog along a paved road during a marathon. The lead runner in the foreground wears a yellow tank top with a black lightning bolt graphic and a white cap. To his left, another runner wears a red tank top with the number 13600. Further back, a runner in a green tank top has the number 1082. The road is flanked by a grassy shoulder and a dense line of trees under a clear sky. A runner in an orange tank top is partially visible on the right edge of the frame.

One section of the route is manned by people giving out Remembrance poppies and, mindful of Arthur's Seat further on, I take one. Not too long after, we pass the Wall of Remembrance on the right, and I start to veer left, ready to greet Arthur: "good morning Arthur" I say and do my best to place the poppy if not on his seat (several runners have stopped and are taking selfies, so it's hard to get near) then at least close by – legend has it that greeting Arthur like this should guarantee me an 'easy' second half of the run. I keep going.



**Visiting Arthur's Seat and the Wall of Honour, two days before Comrades**



Kilometre markers, counting down, come and go, while my watch is on miles, counting up, giving a strange dance of numbers. We're on an uphill stretch when we pass the 42km marker – only a marathon to go! More hills, more aid stations. Worried about the heat, I'm drinking more than I need to, which in combination with my waist pack pressing on my abdomen means I waste time with several Portaloo stops – all part of the learning experience.



**Only a marathon to go!**

The number of people lining the route is amazing. Even outside urban areas there are spectators, many set up for the day with chairs and picnic baskets – some even with barbecues. In areas such as Pinetown the crowds are several people deep and the noise is almost palpable. As a first-time runner, and an international one at that, I get lots of encouragement: "Well done, Debra! Keep going, Debra!" I flash back on the last time I heard such calls, while grimly limping my way through the last 10 miles of the London Marathon with what I later discovered was a stress-fractured pelvis. This time I'm running, and doing okay. We pass the boys of Kearnsey high school on the left, in their smart school uniforms including blazers, and I pity them having to wear those in this heat. Then we pass Ethembeni school on the right. Everywhere, children want you to high-five them and it's impossible to comply with all requests. I target the youngest and the girls, hoping to encourage them to aspire to run this race sometime.

More hills, and I'm walking more of those by now. The 21km marker comes into sight and I run some mental calculations: for some time I've known that there's no way I will finish in under 10 hours, but unless the wheels come off I should easily be under 11 and get my bronze medal – and I could walk from here and still finish in under 12 hours, which is a comforting thought. Polly Shortts is just one more hill by now, to be walked more than run.

The kilometre markers tick down slowly and I'm mentally making my way from one aid station to the next.

Finally I reach the 5km marker: it's only a parkrun from here! I can run a parkrun! Never mind the 82km or so I've already travelled today and my tired legs. From here to the finish line, I promise myself, I'm not walking. I'm going to **run** the parkrun. And I do, even on the slight uphill slopes, I keep running, or at least jogging. I trot down the last street and enter the racecourse, turning left. Down into a tunnel and up the other side, which tests my resolve not to walk, but I keep jogging. A little further. Over the timing mats... but runners ahead of me are still running and I realise we're not actually finished! I see Terry waving at me over the barrier. Not far to go... at last, there's the race clock ahead, reading 10:36... I cross the finish line and slow to a walk, legs going shaky now I'm no longer running. I'm given my bronze medal – small, but highly prized – and a red rose, which is unexpected. I keep walking, slowly and a bit stiffly, following the signs towards the international runners' area. Suddenly Terry appears, ready to help me up the steps and down the other side, as I helped him a year ago, and to guide me. I negotiate the stairs one step at a time, then we show our wrist bands and go through into the International Runners' area, where I collect my kit bag then wobble over to the chairs Terry has gathered for us, finally collapsing slowly onto one of them. I've done it. I've finished. I keep looking at my little medal.

Terry brings me a cup of tea. I drink it, pull some warmer clothes on, get some food. Other runners I know finish and come to join us. The light begins to fade and the clock ticks down towards the 12-hour cut-off for finishing. The atmosphere turns electric as we all stare at the big screen showing the continuing stream of runners. The final count-down begins: 10, 9, 8...come on, come on, hurry... 7, 6, 5... people are screaming at the runners... 4, 3, 2, 1. The gun is fired. It's all over.



**Tired but happy, in the International Runners area after the race**



It's taken me several years to run Comrades – a DNQ (did not qualify) due to my posterior tibial tendon for my first attempt, a DNS (did not start) last year due to the stress-fractured pelvis, with the broken ankle in between. But on this third attempt, I've done it. As I look at my Comrades medal, it means more than 54 miles on road, covered on my own two feet in 10 hours and 36 minutes. It is also a line drawn under those injuries, confirmation that I can run ultramarathons again, set new goals (including the Down run next year, naturally), maybe even a 100-mile race. Who knows?

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For anyone thinking about doing this: it's do-able. Qualification is a marathon in under five hours (faster times earn you a better start pen). Cut-off for finishing Comrades is 12 hours, clock time. The support along the route easily matches anything you'll get in big city marathons – and the views are better. The camaraderie is fantastic and there's both a Runner's World forum thread and a Facebook group where you can share the highs and lows of training with other runners, and get advice if you're a novice. There are several decent hotels available at very reasonable prices in Durban (such as the Belaire Suites where I stayed) – or the Hilton if you want pricier luxury just across the road from the expo. Flights are available for under £500; the Gatwick-Dubai, Dubai-Durban option with Emirates is one of the cheapest, convenient from the Croydon area, and the atmosphere on the Dubai-Durban flight (full of other Comrades runners) is amazing.



**Traditional meet-up of international runners at the Mugg & Bean  
on the seafront the morning after the race**



## THE WOLDINGHAM MARATHON (by Debra Bourne)

The Woldingham Marathon, starting and finishing at Woldingham School, took place three weeks after the Vanguard Way and included stretches of the same trails.

There was a little confusion about how to get to the school (sat navs taking many people to the southern end of the road through the school grounds, which is No Entry) and the race start time (9am according to the website, but actually 9.30am (as indicated on the emails that were sent out to runners, although mine never arrived). Parking was in a field a few hundred yards from the start, and there were just two portaloos, with much longer queues for those than at registration.

I spotted several people, mainly 100 Marathon Club members, who had been at the Vanguard Way marathon, and there were a few other Striders: David Davies, Dave Vinton, Rachel Vinton, Chloe Forster-Coleman, Ozgur Gulec – and Nick Kyritsis, who was helping at one of the aid stations again.

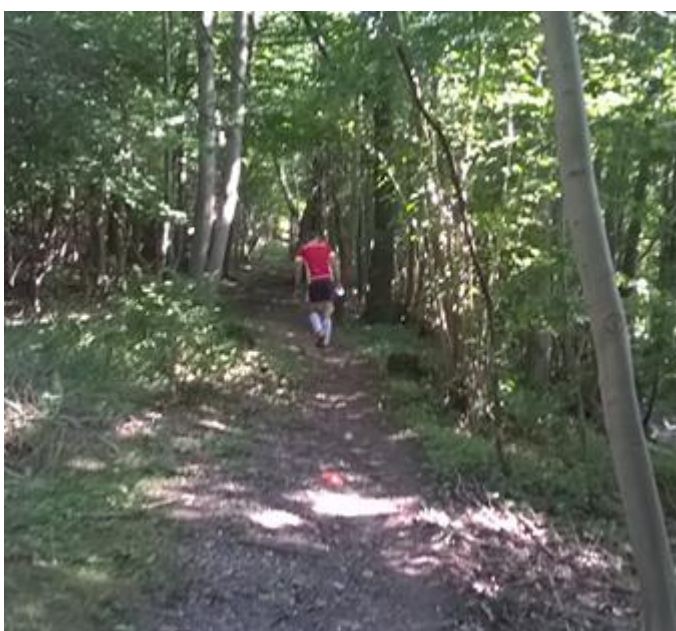
The weather forecast was for sun and high temperatures, so I was wearing a hydration backpack, starting with 1.5 litres in it, to keep me hydrated between the aid stations.



The course is a mixture of real trails, heading through woodland and along fields and up and down hills, bracketed by starting and finishing sections along roads. We started off heading south along the road through Woldingham School for about a mile, then turned sharply and heads uphill through bits of woodland and on trail paths, crossing roads and joining the North Downs Way, down some steps, down through fields and along the edge, running through vegetation quite high on either side of the narrow path, along some more of the North Downs Way. This section was all unshaded, and it was already becoming quite hot. I put my hat on whenever we were in full sunlight, taking it off whenever we were in a woodland area.

Then we met up with the Vanguard Way at Whistler's Steep, where we turned left and started an out-and-back section: climbing up that hill, through the bit of woods at the top, along the road, along the lane with the wall to the left, continuing along the track and down the open section of hill to the first aid station at about six miles, where Nick Kyritsis was dispensing water, coke and half-bananas. Back up the hill, along the track, through the woods and back down Whistler's Steep. At the bottom we turned left to continue on a different section of the North Downs Way, along the edges of fields (again with no shade) and finally heading up the track through the Titsey Plantation to emerge near Botley Head Farm.





I mostly walked up the track, although I did manage some bits of running, and narrowly avoided being tripped up by a Jack Russell Terrier proudly carrying a thick branch about four feet long.

The next section of the route is familiar to any Strider who has run the Botley Head marathon training run: all the way along the road, crossing over to stay on the cycle path and stopping briefly at the second aid station to gulp some water and grab a fig roll, then onwards until, just before Warlingham and the big Sainsbury's, we crossed back over the main road and headed along quiet lanes and tracks unsuitable for motor vehicles, dropping down to cross through Woldingham Golf Club, along another bit of track, across a couple of roads (on bends, with poor visibility, so a bit hair-raising), along another bit of enclosed trail path then emerging onto the private road of the school again for a final section that seemed endless before we returned to where we had started. Here those running the half-marathon stopped and I could see that Rachel and Dave Vinton had already finished.



I admit that heading into the half way point I was so hot that I did wonder about stopping. Then I remembered how I had coped with the heat during Comrades, so I grabbed a couple of cups of water and poured them over my head and down my front and back before drinking some water, eating half a banana, and then setting off again – with Rachel and Dave wishing me good luck.

With only the full marathon runners remaining, we were quite spread out and I was running by myself. The drive felt longer than on the first lap and I definitely welcomed the turn into the woods – uphill, but shaded – and I walked. Through woodland and back onto the open section of the North Downs Way, where I was assisted by a nice cloud that came over and took away the direct sun for a while, which was much appreciated. Back up Whistler's Steep, and continue towards the aid station. Here I started passing the leaders coming back the other way. The first woman passed me, looking very strong, as I was setting off down the hill to the aid station. No other women passed me and I realised that at this point I was second woman! I grabbed water and another half-banana, poured some more water over myself and set off again. Back up the hill and I passed a woman coming down. I recognised her: she had passed me just before the end of the first lap, but.... "weren't you doing the half?" I asked. "Yes, but I switched!" she replied.

At this point my competitive instincts got the better of me. I knew I wasn't going to catch the first woman, but I really didn't want to lose second place. I guessed I was ahead of the third woman by two or three minutes, maybe a little more depending how long she had taken at the aid station, but she had been faster than me on the road at the end of the first lap...



I tried to speed up on the downhill and flat sections, although I didn't even try to run up the hills, particularly not through the Titsey Plantation. Along Limpsfield Road, I really tried to push on, running sub-8:30, which is rather faster than I'm usually moving at 20+ miles into a trail marathon! Onward to the light trail section, passing Kate Knight of Collingwood, who was running the half-marathon, managing to cross the roads without getting flattened by the cars, and dropping down again onto the road back to the school.

This time it really did seem endless, but I pushed on as best I could. Finally I rounded the last corner and crossed the finish line in 4.55 – to get a medal and, unexpectedly, a trophy for that Second Lady position.

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While both the Vanguard Way marathon and the Woldingham marathon are attractive for being local and including some great trails and great views, given the choice I would go for the Vanguard Way, because it's practically all trail. However, if you'd like to do some trail and test yourself on the hills but still have some sections on tarmac to stretch out and run fast, then the Woldingham would suit you better.



## SIX VIEWS OF THE VANGUARD WAY MARATHON

(by Debra Bourne, Nikki Javan, Rachel Lindley, Christina Unwins, Ally Whitlock and Greg Williams)

The Vanguard Way is a national trail starting in Croydon and running for 66 miles through Surrey, Kent and East Sussex to finish at Newhaven on the South Coast. The Vanguard Way Marathon makes use of the first part of this trail, starting in the familiar surroundings of Lloyd Park, and travelling roughly south east to Westerham, before turning round and heading back. Runners in the half-marathon stop at the aid station half way along and retrace their steps from there.

### Debra Bourne:

I've missed running trail races recently, and not run the Vanguard Way Marathon in previous years, for various reasons, so I was really looking forward to this.

Six Striders had decided to run: Christina and Nikki had gone for the half marathon, while Ally, Rachel, Greg and I had entered the full marathon. With such a small event the queue for picking up race numbers was practically non-existent, and even the queue for the toilets wasn't too long. The organisers had put up a gazebo, in which it was possible to leave bags – with the usual warning against leaving valuables. The race briefing was brief, mainly explaining the course markers. The route is marked with permanent VGW signs (although these are not always very visible) and had been additionally marked with yellow-and-black tape, spots and arrows of bright orange temporary paint, and occasionally bring orange ribbon – which was a lot easier to spot in dappled woodland sunlight than was the yellow-and-black.



We set off in a curve through Lloyd Park then out up the lane to Oaks Road, across Coombe Road and down Conduit Lane, remembering to turn left near the bottom. I was already finding the run hard work, much harder than it should have been for easy, fairly flat running. However, my great-nephew had been sneezing all over me two days previously, so I guessed I was fighting a viral infection, and kept going.

After the short road section we reached Littleheath Woods. Through the Woods (with a momentary diversion cut short by Ally running back towards us saying “that’s not the Vanguard Way!” as she turned 90 degrees and ran off on the correct path), across the road and down the track – so far so familiar! Up and through Selsdon Woods, then on to Farleigh Court Golf Club, turning down the path just after the gate, onto the narrow trail which was drier than I’ve ever seen it. At the far side, by Farleigh Court riding Centre and just before the Church, we were greeted by Karim and Darren – armed with a camera but most importantly offering green ear (vegetarian) Percy Pigs! I took a couple and very welcome they were too.

Onward, along more narrow paths and through woodland and along more paths, passing some of the returning half-marathoners before finally reaching the first aid station – the turn-around point for the half-marathon – at about seven miles. More woodland paths then round and through some fields (one containing cattle), climbing over the stiles and descending a steepish hill, then along a bit of farm track and up another hill. I had been keeping Ally and Rachel and some other runners in sight, but stopped to get a stone out of my shoe and they disappeared! Along a long track now, with no route markings and no runners in sight ahead of me, and I began to worry I had missed a turning, so I was very glad when I finally spotted a bit of tape and then an orange arrow on the track. Across a road, through a short wooded section and then descending the steep slope called Whistler’s Steep to join the North Downs Way. Great views on this section! Along the field edges, more paths, crossing some small roads... I thought there was a left turning somewhere, but continued down a wide track, which looked familiar from a few years ago, and past some cyclists, who said they had seen other runners before me. Then I came to a large puddle, going all the way across the path – which also looked familiar, although something in the back of my mind was saying this wasn’t right. I did my best to keep to the edges but still ended up with both shoes soaked through. Then I reached a tunnel under the M25 and was sure it wasn’t right! Yes, it looked familiar – from when I’d lost the track the first time I tried following the Vanguard Way a few years ago ( got my feet wet in the same puddle then also).

Back through the puddle, back up the lane and this time I spotted the route going diagonally across the fields and over the little bridge. Onward! Soon I started being passed by the leaders heading in the other direction, and we had to dodge each other on the narrow paths. I ran on, passing Greg, Rachel and Ally as they ran back towards home, and finally reached the bridge over the motorway; a further downhill stretch and then finally the aid station – although Nick Kyritsis, who was manning the station, instructed us to run past and to the end of the lane to reach the official 13.1 miles turn-around point before we were allowed to return and grab water, coke, half bananas and so on. By this time my watch already boasted more than 14 miles.

Back the way we had come, once more dodging other runners on the narrow sections. Back along the North Downs Way, where I managed to trip on a bit of flint sticking up from the chalk and go full length, scraping one hand on another piece of flint, but one of the other runners hauled me upright, and we ran on. We reached the bottom of Whistler’s Steep and set off on the heart-thumping walk back up the hill. Along the lanes, down the hill, up the other hill, over the stiles and back through the fields, remembering this section of the route and steering some other runners round the edge of one field, then back through the field of cattle, reassuring one lady that we wouldn’t be attacked. More paths, across the green... Then I lost concentration and lost the route again, failing to turn across the pub car park, so that I reached a lane and realised there were no course markers in sight. Back again and I spotted some other runners and got back on track. Soon I was back on properly familiar territory and reassuring other runners that we were on the correct route. Finally back into Lloyd Park following the track of little yellow plastic flags, round the tree, down and across the finish line. Distance covered 27.5 miles, and a little over five hours on the clock, feeling knackered (that viral infection!), but really glad I’d done it!



**Greg Williams:**

The Vanguard Way Marathon was my second marathon. My first was the London Marathon. VGW couldn't be more different from London: all off road, hilly, very low-key, not many spectators/supporters.

I decided on the day to run it (I hadn't pre-entered). I was using it as a training run in preparation for a long distance triathlon I've entered in September. I wasn't certain I was going to run the whole thing, but I knew I wanted to do at least 20 miles (I determined that would get me back to Warlingham, where I could always bail on to a bus). So I felt very little pressure going into the run, and decided just to enjoy myself and see how I go.

The route itself is familiar territory for us Striders, especially for the first/ last quarter (between Croydon and Chelsham) where we regularly run. Despite the organisers' best efforts to mark the route, runners inevitably missed turns, so I would say that Striders have a real advantage in this race, even if it's just finding your way back through Lloyd Park from the end of Conduit Lane!

The rest of the field was a real mixture of abilities. Not many people seemed to be taking it too hard/seriously, although most runners did seem to have a lot of marathons under their belt. I'd definitely recommend it to anyone who likes trail running and has kept the long runs going beyond the usual spring marathon season. For those who haven't, there is also a half-marathon option. My two tips would be to learn the route (preferably get it loaded onto a GPS watch) and to carry a water belt, since there were only 3 feed stations.

For anyone who's wondering, whilst feeling tired at around 20 miles, quite a few of the other runners around me looked rather worse for wear; that gave me the conviction to finish the race, which I did in 4h23.

**Rachel Lindley:**

The Vanguard Way Marathon has to be THE marathon to throw at anyone who assumes because you live in Croydon, your runs must be grey, concrete and flat...





I entered this year for the 3rd time and with some trepidation, having totally tanked in year 1 and seen my boyfriend get his first ever DNF in year 2 with heat exhaustion. Our target this year was simply to finish, and sub 5 hours would be a bonus. Ideally without getting lost, too, though that does seem to be a VGW tradition.

It was a beautiful day, not too hot but clear and dry as we assembled in Lloyd Park. The course is reasonably friendly (and familiar territory to Striders) for the first and last quarters - the 2 mega-hills are both in the middle. Good opportunities to drink and eat something, as well as admiring the stunning views (M25 notwithstanding) and exchanging a few words with fellow runners. VGW has the classic trail-race friendliness; we had a couple of lovely conversations with strangers as the going got tougher, and the out and back route means you get to see most people at least once. I was very glad to have company as we passed a herd of young bulls too...

We eventually finished in around 4h30, much better than years 1 and 2, thanks to reasonable pacing, electrolytes and malt loaf. It was great to see other Striders running, marshalling and supporting, and the welcome finish area is sociable as runners cross the line in ones, twos or even threes with a real sense of achievement. VGW is a seriously tough marathon but the camaraderie, low key friendliness and scenery make it well worth the effort. Thanks to all involved in the organisation and hope to see you next year!

**Ally Whitlock:**

The Vanguard Way Marathon, my tenth 26.2 and most definitely my favourite so far! It had everything I love about running: a tough and challenging rural route, woodland trails, fields to run through, hills to climb and descents to fly down. Stunning views, sunshine and a field of cows thrown in for good measure!

With 3,000ft of elevation (that's a whole lotta hills...!) it was my slowest marathon to date but by far the most enjoyable. I absolutely LOVED it!

**Nikki Javan:**

Before I start telling you about my experiences at the Vanguard Way Half Marathon I should probably introduce myself as most of you won't know me. That's because I'm a new Strider having only joined you all in the summer. In fact, I'm a new runner too, and if any of you

remember your early days of running, it means that there are new experiences around every corner... well the Vanguard Way Half Marathon was a very special first for me. I started running at the beginning of the year when a friend of mine persuaded me to join her for a half marathon in March. Since then I haven't raced and this half gave me not only the opportunity to race again but also to wear a Striders shirt for the first time.

The day itself was fantastic and proves to me just how right I was to make that leap and join the club in the first place. Waiting around with other Striders beforehand not only gave me a sense of belonging but ensured I didn't get any of those pre-race nerves. Emerging from all the trails at Farleigh we were met by a couple more Striders to cheer us on and hand out much needed sweets, although they probably had the marathon runners in mind despite the handful I took. Running all that way without any form of support would have been tough and I definitely felt I had the edge over the rest of the field as I said goodbye to the marathon runners and turned back for home. There were some serious ups and downs on the way back but I couldn't have been happier to see my daughter cheering for me as I crossed the finish line... although I was slightly less delighted that she stole my medal within about 30 seconds (she tells her friends she got it for good running).



### **Christina Unwins:**

I'm a relatively new member of Striders, and to running in general. I first pitched up to Lloyd parkrun, with my 5yr old son in tow for moral support last August and have since done the Striders' Switchback and the Croydon 10K. On the back of the 90 minute club Sunday runs and recently taking up cycling 12 miles back and forth to work 3 days a week I chose the Vanguard Way as my first half marathon!

The vast majority of my experience of running has been on trails so I don't really know any different. I made my final decision to enter the Vanguard Way half Marathon on the morning of the race as I had worked the Friday night and was not entirely certain I would be conscious come Sunday morning... I arrived and collected my race number, had a lovely time chatting with fellow Striders and grabbing pre-race photos and then we were off! I ended up pacing myself with some lovely people doing the full marathon, who kept me company on the way to the turn around and first aid station. The route is very similar to the Club runs, through beautiful woods and fields.

At the turn around point, half bananas, water and flapjacks were available and a lovely lady gave me a pack of Love Hearts she had carried from the start line. On the way back I



somehow managed to miss the turning through the pub and took a bit of a long cut to get back on the route thanks to another competitor also getting lost and alerting me to the fact I was off course! I proceeded to worry I would not complete the full distance and have to do an extra lap of shame around Lloyd park at the end. The fears were needless as in total I did 23.5k in 2:30:36 with the half distance done in 2:18:54. I absolutely loved it and I am planning on returning next year for my first marathon!



**Photos by Christina Unwins (group picture and medal) and Ally Whitlock.**



## THE MARATHON DES SABLES 2017 (by Frans Leijters)

Inspired by a Discovery Channel documentary on James Cracknell's Marathon Des Sables adventure, I have been considering the event for several years. Almost two years ago I decided to prepare my family: show them pictures and carefully ask their permission to spend a week in the Moroccan desert. But my preparations involved more than that. It took well over a year to register for the 2017 event and prepare my equipment. If you are not British, French or Moroccan, registration will be simple, as the organisation prefers a diverse field of nationalities.

Then there is the kit: backpack, lighter, hat, gators, knife, mirror, anti-venom pump, fuel tablets etc. Several items were bought from the WAA Ultra store, being the official MDS-equipment store. That way, I would be certain that my equipment would be approved. Several other items were provided by my employer, the Dutch Ministry of Defense: miniature microfiber towels, a stove and a metal mug.

I also put a lot of thought into my food. The regulations state that participants must have at least 2000 kcal per day. These regulations are fit for tiny ultrarunners from Morocco, who weigh 60 kg and live off half an apple and two biscuits per day. But since I weigh almost 100 kg, I will go through 2000 kcal during a day at the office. Eventually I decided to start the event with 14 kg of dry weight: better to have sore shoulders on the first days than to lack the food to sustain myself.

The next stage was testing. Not only walking with my backpack, but also cooking water in my backyard, recharging my smartphone with a powerbank for a whole week and trying different cookies and energy bars. For seven days, I would have to live off the stuff in my backpack. There are no stores, no electrical outlets and no assistance in the sand dunes near the Algerian border. The smartphone would go on 'stamina mode' and a small, basic model GPS-receiver would record my tracklogs.

Training was less of an issue. In October 2016 I walked the 100 miles on Robben Island in Cape Town, South Africa, to obtain the African Centurion title. After that successful event I dialed down my training activities for a few months to rest my body. And from the Bossche 100 walk in January 2017 I started building up the weight of the backpack and the length of my walks. After several long weekends with for example two days of 57 km or three days of 19, 76 and 36 km I felt confident enough to take on the event. In my tent (number 41) it turned out that I was the only participant to have done any training over 50 km.

So far none of my story has been about Morocco, but that is exactly the message I would like to share. Preparation is everything: have a plan a and a plan b for everything. Have confidence in your training and in your equipment and half the work is done. And then, after a year of preparations, it was time to travel to Ouarzazate Air Base via Paris Charles De Gaulle. On Friday 7 April 2017 I arrived the mild heat of Ouarzazate, where we were smoothly transferred to busses for a six hour drive into the desert. And there I was, on Friday evening, with six (Dutch) strangers in a simple Bedouine tent on a rocky plain, somewhere...

Saturday was also relatively cool (the first two nights in my thin sleeping bag were actually cold), with 30 °C. The day was spent visiting the medical check (to hand in the doctor's statement and ECG), the equipment check, the bib number check... and eating from the buffet. Up to Saturday evening there is almost unlimited food, drinks and water. From Sunday morning to Saturday evening water is rationed and you are on your own food.

The first stage (30 km) on Sunday was easy. Mild sand dunes, river beds and warm plains helped runners and walkers to ease into the event. In the evening the daily routine started:

drink, wash, prepare food, eat food, drink more. I tried to end every stage with 1.5 liters of water to spare as an addition to the 4.5 liters handed to us at the finish of every stage. Six liters of water sounds like a lot, but temperatures were soaring and I required at least 1.5 liters for washing my shirt, washing myself and preparing my meals.

The second stage (39 km) the gloves came off. The day started with high sand dunes, followed by a long stretch of solid ground with small pebbles. The temperature approached 40 °C and in the afternoon we crossed high sand dunes and the Jebel El Otfal, the highest climb of the event. The climb was hard, the descent insane. On one side of the mountain range sand was piled up almost to the summit and we ran (and fell) down for over 300 meters (elevation). After another river bed the day ended in the camp: drink, wash, eat and drink.

Tuesday would prove even more challenging: the third stage (32 km) led over sand dunes to two ridges (steep sandy ascents) with spectacular views. Then we crossed a hot desert plain and climbed Jebel El Otfal again. Since the sandy slope was not an option, the course led around the sand, via rocks and ropes to the summit. The same high sand dunes as yesterday followed and the last hour was spent on an incredibly hot desert plain which I only know from movies: I looked for animal carcasses or a band of raging Arabs, but was only rewarded with the sight of the camp in the distance.

The next day would be my day. The fourth stage would be 86 km and would last well into Thursday. My endurance proved vital: I was one of the first Dutch participants to reach the camp on Thursday morning. But not without effort. This stage was less hilly, but contained at least 60 km of loose sand. The sand became demotivating after several hours: not a single step I took was efficient. You feel your feet sliding and slipping as you walk.

The endless sand combined with temperatures of over 40 °C took their toll. Many participants would need 25 to 30 hours to complete this stage, therefore my stamina had another advantage, because I could use most of the Thursday to rest and recover. Only a small and unexpected sand storm disrupted my tranquil day. With enough recovery time I prepared for the last timed stage on Friday.

During the fifth stage (42 km) we encountered tourists! A hotel, an oasis and then onward to more sand dunes and many long river beds and trails across endless plains. The course was quite easy, but this is the day most people underestimate. The backpacks are almost empty, but the feet are sore and muscles are tired. Eventually, at the finish line, I learned that I was faster than most Dutch runners. My low (walking) speed combined with endurance (short rest stops and no damage to my feet) established my final position, half way through the general ranking.

On Saturday all participants from tent 41 walked the final stage together. We crossed the incredible Merzouga sand dunes in two hours, chatting and taking selfies. This is the solidarity or charity stage, for which rich people can buy an expensive ticket to walk 8 km in hot red sand. We took the time to end this fantastic event together and to enjoy the friendships that we gained this week.

The Marathon Des Sables was high on my bucket list and proved to be as challenging and incredible as I had expected. It is not an impossible event: with sufficient preparation before and discipline during the week in the Moroccan desert it is a dream that any fit and experienced long distance walker or runner can live. But underestimate it and it will truly be a 'highway to hell'.





## **THE EUROPEAN MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIPS (by Alan Dolton)**

In the December issue of this magazine I included a report on the 2016 World Masters Championships which were held in Perth (Australia not Scotland). The World Masters Championships are usually held every two years, alternating with the European Masters Championships. The first European Masters Championships were held in 1978, and the 20th edition of the championships took place in late July and early August in Aarhus, which is on the east coast of Jutland (Denmark). The previous edition of these championships had been held in Izmir in Turkey, where the very hot temperatures had deterred most British distance runners from entering, so Aarhus was definitely a more attractive destination.

Usually I like to fly from Gatwick, but there are no flights from Gatwick to anywhere in Jutland. Rather than travel via Copenhagen, I decided to fly from Heathrow to Billund, which is a smaller town than Aarhus but has a larger airport, partly because it is the headquarters of Lego. From there I travelled by bus to Aarhus. My hotel was about two miles south of the centre of Aarhus, and was very close to the beach.

This was the fourth time I had competed in an international championship, but was the first time I had done so on the track (my first two were on the road, and in Perth I ran in the cross-country). After I had returned from Perth, I had studied the results of the M60 10000 metres there, and was interested to see that the winning time had been 39 minutes 41, that only three of the 15 finishers had broken 40 minutes, and that the last three finishers had been outside 44 minutes. Emboldened by this, I decided to enter the 10000 metres in Aarhus, although I had not run that distance on the track for five years. When the entry lists were published, I was not too surprised to see that on paper I was the slowest of the 18 entrants, but I was surprised to see that 15 of them had declared recent times of under 40 minutes: apart from me, the slowest entrant was David Proffitt of Wales, who had run 41 minutes 19 in Perth, where he had placed ninth. I feared that I had been rather too optimistic in entering and that I would be facing a lonely run at the back of the field.

The 10000 metres was not in the main stadium (Ceres Park) but was in a suburb called Viby, which was about four miles southwest of the centre of Aarhus and about three miles from my hotel. The track at Viby only had five lanes, so it was only being used for races of 1500 metres and longer, and for some of the field events. I started cautiously and ran the first lap in 96 seconds, already at the back of the field, and the first kilometre in 4 minutes 06. I was already about 25 metres behind David, with the rest of the field further in front. I felt that I would be unable to maintain this tempo, but tried to run at about seven-minute mile pace, and reached 5000 metres in 21 minutes 44. However by this time I was over 150 metres behind David, and was beginning to suffer in the humid conditions. I had to reduce my pace, and the only time that I saw other competitors was when they lapped me. I was just about to complete my 19th lap when David came past me on his 20th, meaning that I had been lapped by the entire field. I plodded on and finished in 15th place (there were only 15 finishers) in 46 minutes 32.03.

On the following day, at the same stadium, Angela Copson had an excellent run to win the W70 10000 metres by more than five minutes. Her time of 44 minutes 25.14 seconds was a new world record for a woman aged over 70. I did not see this race, as I was in the main stadium, cheering on Epsom's Diana Norman as she won the W40 heptathlon by more than 500 points, clinching her victory by running 800 metres in 2 minutes 20.79 seconds.

The day after Diana's heptathlon I was back at Viby, competing in the heats of the 1500 metres. There were 24 entrants for this, of whom I was ranked 21st. There were two heats of 12 runners, of whom a total of 16 would proceed to the final the following day. I was drawn in the same heat as Richard Brown, who had finished one place behind me in the British

Masters Championships: the other two runners with slower times than me were drawn in the other heat. As I warmed up, I realised that my legs still felt very tired from the 10000 metres. I again set off cautiously and was about 15 metres behind Richard at the end of the first lap. The gap remained about the same until the bell, when I began working hard to try to close it. I passed Richard with 200 metres to go, and finished two seconds ahead of him, although my time of 5 minutes 52.41 was more than 14 seconds slower than I had run in the Surrey Masters Championships in June. We were both faster than the two slowest runners from the other heat, so that I finished in my predicted position of 21st overall.

The finals of the various 1500 metre races took place at Ceres Park on the following day. Just before lunch there was a heavy thunderstorm, and the events in progress were suspended for about an hour. Fortunately Ceres Park, unlike Viby, had a large covered stand for spectators to take shelter. The first of the 1500 metre races was the W70 race. Only two days after her 10000 metres, Angela Copson produced another outstanding run to win the race by more than a minute. She recorded 5 minutes 54.97 (just outside her own world record for the distance), while the runner-up recorded 7 minutes 00.97. The 1500 metres proved to be a very successful event for British runners: there were also wins for Zoe Doyle (W35), Louise Rudd (W40), Anna Garnier (W60), Nancy Hitchmough (W65), Guy Bracken (M55) and John Skelton (M65).



**With other British athletes, spectating at Ceres Park (photo by Sue Yeomans)**

Three days after the 1500 metre finals, I was back at Viby to watch most of the women's 5000 metre races. I was pleased to see Anna Garnier win the W60 race in 21 minutes 18.46 and Angela Copson win the W70 race in 21 minutes 44.66 – times which many younger male Striders would be happy to achieve. Former Collingwood runner Mary James (now with South London Harriers) was second in the W40 race, while Claire Thompson of Glasgow (who had won the W40 steeplechase two days earlier) placed third.



**Mary James and Claire Thompson after their 5000 metre race (on a dry track)**

The men's 5000 metre races took place the following day. In the M60 category, there were 40 entrants and I was ranked 31st. The procedure here was that the 20 slowest runners were to race first, with the 20 fastest runners to race immediately afterwards. Unfortunately it began to rain very heavily about 30 minutes before my race. Having run 21 minutes 44 for the first half of the 10000 metres a week earlier, I had obviously hoped to improve on that time. However the heavy rain made warming up difficult and made the track slippery. I started off in about 12th place, and by about 2000 metres I had worked my way up to sixth. However the first five runners were too far in front of me, and I began to tire in the second half of the race. Three of the runners whom I had overtaken came past me again, so that I



placed ninth out of the 16 finishers, and my time was slower than I had run in our Veterans League match at Kingsmeadow in June. Although I was disappointed by my time, I was pleased that I had finished in the middle of the field, instead of at or near the back as I had in my previous two races.



**My 5000 metre race – on a wet track (photo by Linda Oxlade)**

This was my first trip to Scandinavia, and I enjoyed seeing some of Jutland, although I had not anticipated just how much it would rain. The heavy rainfall certainly explained why the countryside was so green. (Jutland usually has its highest rainfall in August and its lowest rainfall in April, so that anyone wanting to visit Jutland for a holiday would probably be advised to visit in late Spring or early summer.) I also found the Danish language very difficult: there are a lot of silent consonants, so that many words are pronounced very differently to what one might expect from their spelling.

Although I was disappointed by my own performances, I was inspired by watching older athletes such as 91-year-old Dalbir Singh Deol, who won the M90 100 metres, 200 metres and 400 metres, and 72-year-old Miloslava Rocnakova, who won the W70 women's steeplechase. The next edition of the European Masters Championships is scheduled to take place in September 2019 in Jesolo, which is about 18 miles from Venice. Before then, the next edition of the World Masters Championships is scheduled to take place in September 2018, with the track events and road races in Malaga, and the cross-country races on a woodland course on the outskirts of Torremolinos. If any other Striders are interested in taking part in international athletics, the first step is to join one of the regional clubs that are affiliated to the British Masters Athletics Federation: for most of us, this will be the Southern Counties Veterans AC (<http://www.scvac.org.uk/index.htm>), who organise the track and field league which Striders compete in on Monday evenings.

# **BOOK REVIEW: THE RUNNER'S GUIDE TO HEALTHY FEET AND ANKLES**

**(by Brian W Fullem: reviewed by Alan Dolton)**

Many runners will suffer from foot or ankle injuries during their career. This book is almost 200 pages long, but is set in a large typeface and has plenty of colour illustrations, so it is much more readable than some runners might fear.

The author himself reached a good standard as a runner, recording personal bests of 3 minutes 52 for 1500 metres and 14 minutes 25 for 5000 metres. He has worked as a podiatrist for more than 25 years.

The first chapter of the book deals with running shoes and orthotic devices. He observes that 'the best place to buy new shoes is a specialty running store'. Runners should only consider orthotics if they have an injury or series of injuries that aren't improving with treatment.

The second chapter is entitled 'keeping your feet and ankles healthy'. Among the subjects covered are blisters, fungal infections and sprained ankles. He observes that runners who suffer from sprained ankles should do some balancing exercises as soon as possible after the injury.

The third chapter is entitled 'plantar fasciitis and other types of heel pain'. He observes that 'plantar fasciitis' is often a misnomer, because runners are often suffering from fasciosis (degeneration of the fascia) rather than from fasciitis (inflammation of the fascia). Fasciitis is often aggravated by tight calf muscles, and runners who suffer from fasciitis or fasciosis should do regular calf stretches. He recommends stretching the calf by leaning into a wall rather than by dropping the heel from a step, expressing the view that the latter technique can cause too much traction and can aggravate the fascia.

The fourth chapter deals with tendon injuries. Again, he observes that many runners are suffering from Achilles tendinosis (degeneration of the tendon) rather than from tendonitis (inflammation of the tendon). Runners who suffer from Achilles pain should do regular calf stretches (including the gastrocnemius muscle as well as the soleus). He also discusses 'chronic exertional compartment syndrome', a condition which has affected several elite runners (including John Walker and Mary Slaney) who have run high mileages at high intensity, where the muscles swell to the point that they are compressing the tibial nerve: this injury requires surgery.

The fifth chapter deals with stress fractures. He observes that not all stress fractures are easily visible in X-rays or MRI scans, and expresses the view that CT scans are preferable to MRI scans. Runners who suspect that they have a metatarsal stress fracture should see a podiatrist.

The sixth chapter is entitled 'core and foot strength'. He comments that 'if I had to choose one group of muscles to strengthen and function better in order to improve running performance and help prevent injury in the foot and ankle, it would be the core muscles'. The chapter includes several good colour photographs of various exercises which he recommends.

The seventh chapter is entitled 'general guidance on injury prevention'. He advises runners to keep a log recording how many miles they have run in each pair of running shoes. He advises regular stretching, particularly for the calf, hamstring and gluteal muscles. He also

recommends that runners should ensure that they have an adequate intake of vitamin D and calcium.



**The author's recommended stretch for the right gastrocnemius muscle  
(note that the knee must be straight)**

The last two chapters are entitled 'when to seek surgery' and 'new treatments and technologies'. One hopes that very few Striders will need to refer to these chapters, although chapter eight does include some interesting X-rays of Paula Radcliffe's right foot before and after she had surgery to correct a bunion.

One slight weakness is that the book does not include an index, although the logical arrangements of the chapters should mean that readers should not face too much difficulty in locating the author's coverage of a particular injury. It is also arguable that the author may have assumed slightly too much anatomical knowledge on the part of some of his readers. Nevertheless, this is a useful book which I would recommend to any runner who has been suffering from foot and/or ankle injuries.



## COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: JUNE – AUGUST 2017

Three Striders won medals in the Surrey Masters Championships, at Ewell on 4 June. Kevin Burnett won the M75 3000 metre walk in a club age-group record of 24 minutes 24.2, and was second in the shot (4.97), discus (15.37) and hammer (14.69). Sandra Francis won the W60 long jump with a club age-group record of 3 metres 13, and was second in both the 100 metres (17.74) and 200 metres (37.43). Alan Dolton was second in the M60 1500 metres (5.38.07) and 800 metres (2.58.18). On the same day, Michael Stewart was 58th in the Dorking 10-mile road race (63.25), with Simon Ambrosi 61st (63.40) and Graeme Drysdale 84th (66.15). Striders' women were led by Carolyn Storey (76.20), Selena Wong (85.46) and Yasmin Anderson (88.43). Robin Jamieson set a club over-70 record of 96 minutes 09.

In the Southern Veterans League match at Kingsmeadow on 12 June, Paul Cripps won the over-50 high jump with a new club record of 1 metre 60. He also won the triple jump (10.21) and was second in the 200 metres in a club over-50 record of 27.9. Alan Dolton was second in the over-60 5000 metres in a club age-group record of 21 minutes 54.4. For Striders' women, Sandra Francis was third in the over-60 200 metres in a club age-group record of 37.1 seconds, while Steph Upton set a club over-40 record of 9 metres 55 in the hammer. Striders' men were equal third of the seven clubs in the match, while their women were fifth.

In the Richmond 10 kilometre road race on 18 June, Alastair Falconer placed 45th in 36 minutes 59. Michael Stewart was 88th in 39 minutes 04, one place ahead of Matthew Stone who recorded the same time. Striders' women were led by Michelle Clarke who placed 362nd overall (50.29). Selena Wong and Allie Cairnie were both timed at exactly 52 minutes, finishing 389th and 390th respectively.

In the final Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Croydon Arena on 10 July, Paul Cripps won the over-50 high jump (1.40) and long jump (4.62), placed second in the 100 metres (13.9), and was third in the shot in a club age-group record of 8 metres 39. Sam O'Dongo set two club over-40 records, placing second in both the 100 metres (12.3) and 400 metres (56.6). Robin Jamieson was second in the over-70 1500 metres in a club age-group record of 6 minutes 52.0, while Neil Riches set a club over-55 shot record of 7 metres 15. For Striders' women, Sandra Francis was second in both the over-50 100 metres (17.0) and the 2000 metre walk, where she set a club over-60 record of 14 minutes 40.2. Linda Daniel set a club over-55 400 metre record of 89.9. Striders' men placed third in the match (and fourth in the final league table), while their women were fifth.

On 15 July Striders had a total of 17 finishers in the Elmore 7-mile road race, at Chipstead. They were led by Steve Massey who placed 69th in 46 minutes 47. Steve Harris was 75th (47.09) and Luke Burden 77th (47.13). Striders' women were led by Serena Stracey who placed 122nd (50.13). Steph Upton was 124th (50.30) and Maggie Statham 145th (52.15).

Peter Mills ran well to place tenth in the Elmbridge 10 kilometre road race on 23 July, recording 34 minutes 17. Graeme Drysdale was 68th (38.39), with Steve Massey 90th (39.57) and Mike Stewart 98th (40.23). Striders' women were led by Allie Cairnie who placed 238th (47.29). She was followed by Adele Boesinger (51.47) and Karen Peake (56.17).

In the Wimbledon five-kilometre road race on 13 August, Graeme Drysdale placed 75th (19.19), Darren Woods was 88th (19.52), and John O'Mahony 89th (19.52). For Striders' women, Maggie Statham was 144th (22.33), Michelle Clarke 165th (23.22), and Allie Cairnie 174th (23.58). This was the final race in the Surrey Road League. In the final table, Striders' women placed ninth while their men were 12th. Individually, Maggie Statham did very well to win the women's over-55 category, while Selena Wong was sixth in the over-35 category and Adele Boesinger was sixth in the under-35 category.

## **30 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 1987**

The Wimbledon Half-Marathon took place on 6 September. The winner was Mike Boyle of Herne Hill in 69 minutes 58. The first woman was Caroline Cahill in 89 minutes 03. She had recently moved from Belfast to Croydon, and had run 3 hours 05 in the Glasgow Marathon. She joined Striders a few weeks after the race, strengthening the club's women's team.

In the Slough Marathon on 13 September, Striders' Dave Langley ran a personal best of 2 hours 52 minutes. Alan Purchase ran 3 hours 17, while Dave Hoben ran 3 hours 35.

The Surrey Cross-Country League began its 26th season with matches on Saturday 24 October. The Division One match was held at Wimbledon Common. Aldershot won the team event with Boxhill second. In the Division Two match at Milford, host club Guildford & Godalming won with Croydon Harriers second and South London Harriers third. Striders competed in the Division Three match on a very tough course at the Devils Punch Bowl, Hindhead. Dulwich Runners won the match with 369 points, with home club Haslemere second (483). Striders did well to place third (490), with Camberley fourth (503). Striders' 14 runners were led home by Henry Galvan who ran well to finish sixth. Steve Harman also ran well for 15th, while John McGilvray, making his league debut for Striders after joining from local rivals Surrey Beagles, was 21st. Striders' other runners were: 31 Nigel Davidson, 41 Ian Wallwork, 42 Colin Golding, 61 Steve Owen, 83 Len Picott, 87 Colin Cotton, 114 Dave Hoben, 131 Ron Carver, 134 Simon Smith, 136 John McKenty, 153 Kevin Burnett.

One big frustration for road runners is running a good race on a course which subsequently transpires to be short of the advertised distance. There was an example of this on 1 November, when the recently merged Redhill & Surrey Beagles AC staged what was advertised as a ten-mile road race on a new course, not officially measured, starting and ending at Chipstead Rugby Club. Many of the runners set what appeared to be new personal bests, but the course was subsequently measured by a member of SLH who found that it was more than 400 yards short of the advertised distance. This helped to explain why Striders' first five finishers, and Croydon Harriers' first four finishers, had all appeared to set new personal bests.

The second Croydon 10K was originally scheduled for Sunday 18 October, but had to be postponed because a heavy storm on the previous Thursday led to fallen trees blocking the course in Oaks Road. The race was eventually held on Sunday 15 November. The winner was Lawrence Marsh of South London Harriers, in 31 minutes 15 seconds. Mark Gregory (Boxhill) was second in 31 minutes 40, with Mike Cody of Herne Hill third (32.00) and future Strider Alan Dolton fourth (32.09). The first over-40 to finish was Chris Woodcock of Blackheath, who placed 8th overall in 33 minutes 48. The second over-40 was Simon Morris of Striders, who placed 12th overall in 34 minutes 12. He was also the first Strider to finish. Next for Striders was another veteran, John McGilvray, who ran 34 minutes 57 for 21st place overall and fourth in the over-40 category.

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships were held at Coulsdon on 12 December. The men's race was won by Clive Hensby of Woking. Aldershot's former Olympic marathon runner Bernie Ford placed second, while Bob Treadwell was third for Redhill & Surrey Beagles. Aldershot won the team event with Woking second and Boxhill third. SLH were sixth and Croydon Harriers ninth. Striders only had three finishers: John McKenty was 170th with Ron Carver 172nd and Kevin Burnett 188th. The women's race was won by Philippa Mason of Guildford, while Bromley's international track runner Shireen Bailey was second. Guildford won the team event with Thames Hare & Hounds second and Woking third. The under-17 race was won by Croydon Harriers' promising teenager Karen Sutton.

## **10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN AUTUMN 2007**

The Surrey Road Relay Championships took place at Wimbledon on 8 September. Striders' most successful team was the over-50s, who placed fifth of the 11 teams in this category. David Batten produced an excellent run of 17 minutes 13, which was Striders' fastest time of the day. Striders' women also did well to place seventh out of 14 teams. Unfortunately, Striders' senior men were without several of their first-choice runners, and had to settle for 17th place of the 18 teams in this category.

Striders held the annual Switchback five-mile race on 22 September. The winner was a non-club runner, Christopher Gray, who ran 30 minutes 53. The first Strider was Bob Ewen who placed third (31.26). The first woman was second-claim Strider Helen Furze who ran very well to place seventh overall in 33.03, six seconds ahead of Helena Laczko of Herne Hill.

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League began its 29th season with a match at Esher on 13 October. Striders placed fifth in the Division Two match. The team was led by Faye Stammers who ran well to finish 25th in 33 minutes 43, just one place and eight seconds ahead of club colleague Kerry Backshell. They were closely followed by new member Susie Halsall who made an excellent debut to place 28th in 33 minutes 54. Steph Upton was 37th (34.46) and another newcomer, Gill Hardy, completed the A team in 51st place (36.03).

Meanwhile, Striders' men were competing in the Division Two match at Richmond Park. Our under-17s placed fourth of the nine clubs in the division, led by Nicholas Batten, who ran very well to finish fourth, covering the undulating four-kilometre course in 17 minutes 7 seconds. Our senior men placed sixth, led by Duncan Lancashire who placed 12th, covering the five-mile course in 29 minutes 50 seconds. Striders' next finisher was Justin Macenhill, who was making a welcome return to racing after a long absence through injury, and placed 31st in 31 minutes 29. Veteran Bob Ewen ran well to place 43rd in 32 minutes 30, while Simon Ambrosi showed good improvement to place 50th in 33 minutes 09.

The 32nd Croydon 10K took place on 21 October. The winner was Mike Skinner of Blackheath, in 30 minutes 51 seconds. The first over-50 was Striders' Bob Ewen, who placed 28th overall in 38 minutes 30.

The second Surrey Cross-Country League matches of the season took place on 10 November. Striders' women competed in Division Two at Cranford and finished fourth of the 21 clubs in the match, lifting them to third in the overall league table. The team was led by Serena Stracey, returning to form after a long absence through injury. She ran very well to place 15th of the 119 finishers, covering the six-kilometre course in 23 minutes 39 seconds. Faye Stammers also ran well to place 28th in 25 minutes 22, with Steph Upton 33rd (26.06), Kerry Backshell 38th (26.39) and Suzy Yates 41st (26.44).

Meanwhile Striders' men placed seventh in their Division Two match at Epsom Downs. Our leading runner was again Duncan Lancashire who ran well to place tenth of the 149 finishers. New recruit James Buchanan made an excellent debut for the club, holding on well to place 13th after an ambitiously fast start. Justin Macenhill was our next man home in 34th place, while his brother Damian finished 47th.

The South of Thames Cross-Country Championship took place at Nork Park in December. Striders' women did well to place fourth, while our men placed tenth. Striders' women were led home by Kerry Backshell who ran well to finish 20th, covering the seven-mile course in 50 minutes 55 seconds. She was closely followed by Suzy Yates who finished 22nd (51.15). Emily Campbell was 35th (55.27) and Kim Ford was 41st (61.46).





**Our over-50 team who placed fifth in the 2007 Surrey Road Relay  
(Left to right: David Batten, Colin Cotton, Alan Dolton, Bob Ewen)**

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Athletes such as, Usain Bolt, Jessica Ennis, Mo Farah etc.

Rugby, Tennis, Cycling and many more.

Please email any enquiries to: [lorraine@lhunte.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:lorraine@lhunte.wanadoo.co.uk)